

# Where's the

Sailors and Marines who attend a motorcycle safety course learn that wearing a helmet is mandatory—both on and off base.



Photo by Kaylee LaRocque

# Leadership?

By Joe Perfetto,  
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I was riding home when I saw an active-duty student who had attended motorcycle-safety class two weeks earlier. He was riding without a helmet.

During the Basic Rider Course (BRC) and the Experienced Rider Course (ERC) suite, we review risk management and OpNav Instruction 5100.12G with the students. The instruction describes required riding gear and tells when and how it will be worn. For active-duty military, there is no option: Riding gear will be worn while riding a motorcycle on or off base—period.

I saw the same former student three times within an hour, and he was riding without a helmet each time. The third time I saw him, he waved to me, which made me think he felt I couldn't do anything about his failure to follow the rules. He was mistaken, and I was upset that he had waved to me in that setting.

The next morning, I e-mailed the safety manager at the former student's command, asking that his completion card be returned. This action would require him to retake the BRC.

The former student's immediate supervisor took charge of the situation and came to see me. He reminded me that the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) doesn't say that people have to wear riding gear in order to carry their completion cards.

I acknowledged he was right. The MSF isn't legislative; it's a non-profit organization. However, if a CO says I can pull a completion card, then it happens.

What irked me most about this situation was that it showed a lack of leadership. The former student is an E-4, which means he had to have taken a leadership course and to have passed an advancement exam, so he knows how to read. He was stationed at Great Lakes, Ill., before his assign-

ment to Naples. Every day as he left the base at Great Lakes, he pulled over and took off his helmet and vest because "everyone else did it." He thought gear was required only on base.

The supervisor confirmed the E-4's pullover site was right outside the gate, which meant security personnel, as well as people in leadership roles (e.g., officers and chiefs), could see what was happening. Yet, none of them did anything about it, and some of them probably even joined the E-4 every day in taking off their riding gear. So, where was the leadership?

The E-4 said he figured because it was OK to remove his gear in Illinois (a helmet-optional state), it was OK to do the same thing in Italy. According to his Naples supervisor, the E-4 was "in shock" when he read the part of the OpNav instruction—in italics—that says what he was doing is punishable under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. He was counseled and told if he was seen again without proper riding gear he would be taken to captain's mast. Did the E-4's problem stem from not listening to what was said during the riding course he took, or did he just choose to ignore the rules? No one but him really knows.

My concern is that people in leadership positions aren't setting the right example for their junior personnel by enforcing orders—in this case, OpNav Instruction 5100.12G. I would think military personnel have shed enough blood on our nation's highways to convince them that they really aren't invincible.

I've heard all the reasons for not wearing full riding gear. The problem with those reasons is they don't address that one time the other driver or rider doesn't see you, sand or pebbles suddenly appear on the roadway, or oil drips from the car ahead of you. Without all your protective gear in those situations, you may be in trouble.


Let me leave you with one final thought. Numerous meetings have been held concerning what to do about motorcycle riders and the lack of riding gear on some of them. This situation poses unique problems overseas, where security personnel have only limited off-base jurisdiction. For bases in the continental United States, a suggestion has arisen to get local law enforcement involved. Riders with stickers but no riding gear wouldn't be allowed to bring their bikes on base. Oh, yea!—



Dressing like this guy and letting the wind blow through your hair isn't an option for Sailors and Marines.

There's that leadership thing again.

So, the next time you have to fill out a supervisor's mishap report, draft a message about an injury or fatality, or visit someone at home or in the hospital about a motorcycle-crash victim, ask yourself who really was at fault. Was it you the leader, you the supervisor, or just you?

Wear your gear, ride safe, and keep the rubber-side down. 

*The author was assigned to NSA Naples, Italy, when he wrote this article.*

An advertisement for the Web Enabled Safety System (WESS). It features a blue background with a red border. At the top, it says "Coming to a computer near you" in orange. Below that is the WESS logo, which consists of the word "WESS" in large blue letters with a red swoosh and a yellow ship icon above it. Under the logo, it says "Web Enabled Safety System" in black. The main body of text reads: "Years of research and planning, and tens of thousands of hours of software design and programming. The result: easier reporting, higher quality data, and powerful tools for studying mishaps and identifying trends." Below this, it says "The goal: prevention." in a larger font. At the bottom right is the Navy Safety Center logo, and at the bottom left is the website address "www.safetycenter.navy.mil".